

VI. OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

Shall include an inventory of recreational resources, open space areas and recorded access to such resources and areas. The element shall also contain an analysis of forecasted needs and policies for the management and protection of such resources and areas. The policies and implementation techniques must be identified for inclusion in the implementation program element.

(Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act 45-22.22-6)

Narrative

Introduction

Woonsocket has benefited from a long history of civic improvement efforts, one of the most note-worthy being the dedication of large tracts of land for public use in the 1890s. These tracts of land became the core of the City's park system, and include the present-day Cold Spring, Cass and Globe Parks. Over the years, other City parks, and more recently conservation areas and playgrounds, have been added to the system. Today, Woonsocket remains committed to the pursuit of a consistent program of park acquisition and rehabilitation.

The Open Space and Recreation Element has been developed to address the main issues and concerns which surround the City's park system, including:

- Park maintenance;
- Recreational needs of the elderly;
- Recreational activities and places to go for the youth of the City;
- Community responsibility;
- Vandalism;
- Public safety enforcement; and
- Opportunities for expansion.

Land Form

Woonsocket's physical character is sharply defined by its rugged topography and the Blackstone River. The City's few remaining areas of undeveloped land have severe physical constraints, including steep topography, exposed ledge and wetlands. Current development practices and policies adopted by the City are designed to ensure that future development of these remaining areas will include the protection of open space through the establishment of dedicated conservation areas.

The City's parks necessarily reflect the general character of the land with their steeply sloping hillsides, river frontage and incorporated wetland areas. This is both an opportunity and a constraint, providing sites of great physical beauty and interest, yet limiting areas for active recreational facilities and making the provision of handicap accessibility extremely difficult. In many instances, the steep slopes also provide a feeling of isolation that helps to create a distinction between the natural settings within the parks and the densely developed urban environment surrounding them. At the same time, however, this isolation engenders a perception of danger that may inhibit the usage of these parks.

Demographics

As discussed in the demographic profile contained in the Introduction to this Plan, Woonsocket's population has declined from a high of 50,211 in 1950 to 43,877 in 1990. According to 1980 U.S. Census figures, the City experienced a net out-migration in all age groups except for those over 75 years of age, which demonstrated a net in-migration. The results of the 1990 Census show a further increase in this component of the population as a proportion of the total population, while, the absolute number of persons over 70 years old decreased slightly.

From our public opinion poll, we have learned that this age group uses the parks less than any other. The outdoor recreational

activities that draw the elderly to the parks tend to be passive, rather than active in nature. Walking, relaxing, and attending cultural events are popular pastimes for the over-70 residents. Providing outdoor recreational activities for the elderly presents specific problems. Among these are concerns about safety, access and most importantly, transportation to the parks. An effort must be made to improve Woonsocket's parks and recreational services so that they attract and meet the needs of this growing population.

Although 1990 Census figures show a continued decline in the proportion of school-aged children living in Woonsocket, actual school enrollment is expected to increase over the next decade. Woonsocket presently has an active program of league sports targeted for school-aged children. However, much concern has been raised about a lack of more independent recreational opportunities and summer programs for young people in the community.

Information from the Woonsocket School Department and from various human services providers indicates that the City has experienced a significant influx of immigrant groups over the past twenty years. Southeast Asians and Hispanics of various nationalities make up a notable portion of that influx. It has been observed that Southeast Asian young adults have made heavy use of the City's tennis and volleyball courts, and it is believed that both groups may contribute to an increased interest in adult soccer leagues.

Overall, Woonsocket is not anticipating major changes in demographics, in either total numbers or distribution. The existing larger than average proportion of elderly people, increasing numbers of school-aged children and new immigrant populations are of principal concern.

Development Patterns

The most salient point that affects the provision of outdoor recreation for Woonsocket is that the City is “land poor.” With approximately 44,000 residents, and concentrations of industry and commerce, on only 7.9 square miles of land, relief from dense development is often needed yet difficult to establish. In terms of land use, the options available to the City are:

- To protect those remaining areas of the City that are undeveloped from unsympathetic development;
- To find pockets of space in the urban matrix that can be devoted to recreational purposes; and
- To make more effective use of the space currently devoted to recreation.

Much of the City's population lives in the older areas of the north and west sides of the City. These areas are characterized by small lots of multifamily dwellings. The City provides direct support for the acquisition and rehabilitation of recreational facilities through its Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. The program responds to the need for outdoor recreation in densely developed areas. The impact such facilities can have on improving the quality of life for the residents of the community is significant. To accommodate the recreation needs of these older, more densely populated areas, the City must continue to concentrate on renovating, upgrading, and maintaining existing facilities.

Eastern Woonsocket, and to some extent the southern portion of Woonsocket, are where most of the new residential development areas are located. Geographically, we see a slow continuation of the residential development in the eastern and southern portions of the City. To accommodate the recreation needs of these areas, the City must look into protecting what little land remains for future park development.

Woonsocket has four remaining large tracts of undeveloped, privately held land. The first of these tracts encompasses the land north of Rhodes Avenue in the northwest corner of the City. Land was acquired south of Rhodes Avenue and added to the existing

Green Acres Conservation Area, which now totals 40.5 acres. Extending this conservation area north across the Avenue would not presently be in the City's best interest. The existing conservation area is already a large spatial commitment, and Rhodes Avenue forms a natural barrier between the two tracts of land. The land west of the Booth Pond Conservation Area, in the southern portion of Woonsocket, forms the second large tract of undeveloped land. This land is largely constrained by rock outcrops and wetlands. ~~The City has tried to acquire some of this land in order to extend the Booth Pond Conservation Area, but has not been successful to date.~~ **A portion of this land will be developed as part of the proposed Municipal Economic Development (MED) Zone east of Park Square. The economic benefits and land use changes related to the MED Zone are discussed in the Economic Development and Land Use Elements of this plan. A substantial area of the proposed MED Zone land will remain open space due to wetland constraints. This "buffer zone" will be the section of the MED Zone which is closest to the Booth Pond Conservation Area, protecting the conservation area from any potential development impacts.**

The land east of Jillson Avenue in the southern portion of the City, and the area around Iron Rock Brook in the eastern portion of the City, form the remaining undeveloped parcels. Much of the area east of Jillson Avenue is in a groundwater recharge area. Conservation of the most sensitive parcels would therefore be in the best interest of the public. ~~Similarly, it is envisioned that the land immediately surrounding Iron Rock Brook will someday be acquired for conservation purposes. This area is the site of two failed housing developments and is a highly valued natural resource. The City would like to protect a large portion of this area against further developmental threats with the intention of eventually creating a linear passive recreation area.~~

All four of these areas should be surveyed to determine the significance of their natural resources and their potential for conservation or passive recreational use. As of this writing, there are no unprotected areas in Woonsocket that have been noted in the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management's Open

Space or Landscape Inventories, nor are there any known rare or endangered species in Woonsocket. One of the objectives for the above mentioned surveys would be the identification of any unrecognized resources which might fit into those categories.

Persons surveyed in a public opinion poll expressed the belief that Woonsocket's undeveloped and natural areas are beneficial to the community, that the preservation of conservation areas within the City boundaries is important, and that any future development ought to have limited impact on the City's natural areas. When asked if the City's remaining land should be developed or left as open space, a full 69% stated a preference for that land to remain undeveloped.

Map VI.1 shows the City's existing protected open space, as well as the areas of undeveloped privately owned land referenced above.

Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor

Of particular concern to the City is the protection and expanded use of its dominant geographical feature, the Blackstone River. Woonsocket sees the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor and the building of related parks, bicycle paths and developments, as a great opportunity to create a resource that will improve the quality of life of its residents. The City has an opportunity to capture its river frontage and create a continuous parkway, which can be incorporated into the Heritage Corridor system.

A number of City-owned lots along the river have been developed in conjunction with Heritage Corridor development and others have been zoned for protection and eventual development with other Heritage Corridor development. The City will continue to pursue rehabilitation and development of its own Heritage Corridor-related parks and facilities, and will take an active role in the coordination of regional developments. Increased public access, expansion of water-related recreational activities, and

related issues are also addressed in the Heritage Corridor and Land Use Elements of this Plan.

Administrative Context

The administrative layout of the City of Woonsocket is such that recreational facilities and programs fall under the jurisdiction of the Department of Public Works, Division of Parks and Recreation. However, the Department of Planning and Development has traditionally been responsible for the development and administration of grant applications for the parks, and for the design and construction of park facilities, including large-scale reconstruction projects and land acquisitions.

The Parks and Recreation Division is responsible for the following services:

- Maintenance of parks and recreational fields, courts and hockey rinks;
- Organization of recreational programs;
- Coordination of league activities;
- Management of special events;
- Trimming and removal of City-owned trees;
- Maintenance of City-owned fencing, including fencing around reservoirs;
- Installation of Christmas decorations;
- Plowing and cleaning sidewalks at schools;
- Coordination of School Department physical education and team use of park facilities; and
- Removal of abandoned vehicles from City property.

Not all of these duties are recreation- or park-related, and some, like the removal of junk vehicles, could be relegated to a more appropriate agency. This factor is addressed in more detail in the Parks, Recreation and Tourism Action Plan (Appendix E). Implementation of the goals, policies and action strategies recommended in this Plan will require the prior establishment of

strong administering agencies that have the leadership, focus and enterprise to put the actions into effect.

Monies for park and recreation projects come from a variety of State and federal programs, and are supplemented by limited sources of local revenue. This local revenue consists of a \$10,000 yearly appropriation entitled the Green Acres Program, and monies from the sale of City-owned land, called the Land Trust. In addition, the monies that support the salaries and the operating funds for the Division of Parks and Recreation come from the City's General Fund.

While Woonsocket has been aggressive in pursuing grant opportunities for major capital developments, supplemented largely by CDBG funds, the City's financial commitment to on-going facility maintenance and recreation programming has been severely limited in recent years. When compared with parks and recreation expenditures for other Rhode Island communities Woonsocket is clearly at the lower end of the spectrum.

The economic outlook for the future is increasingly encouraging. Woonsocket historically has suffered greatly from economic downturns, but the present and near term future look brighter. As city residents continue to look for inexpensive and close-to-home opportunities for recreation, the City will need to continue maintaining its many parks. However, even in light of better economic indicators, the pressures of competing needs for scarce municipal funds continue. The City must look beyond its limited traditional resources to support park and open space development and maintenance.

Initiatives must include increasing involvement with other agencies within City government for coordinated programs, and working with private and community groups, State and federal organizations and agencies. The establishment of independent organizations to raise monies and serve as park advocates should also be explored. In addition to the aggressive pursuit of outside funding sources, the City should explore the possibility of

collecting fees and establishing concessions for revenue generation. It is very important that the City has a true appreciation of the value of volunteer efforts and takes better advantage of the resource represented in the people of Woonsocket.

Inventory of Existing Facilities

The City of Woonsocket has 11 parks with facilities for active recreation (including the School Department's Barry Field), 3 conservation areas, 2 areas with both playing fields and conservation land, and 6 playgrounds, plus numerous tracts of open space reserved as land surrounding holding ponds, land banked for future development, and land protected through development easements. These locations are shown in *Map IV.1*.

The Woonsocket Housing Authority has a total of 4 playgrounds at their Morin Heights and Veterans Memorial family housing complexes. In addition, community rooms for meetings and indoor recreational activities are provided at these housing complexes and at the elderly housing high-rises.

One method of analyzing the adequacy of the land area in the City devoted to public recreational space is to compare it to a set of standards (see *Table IV.1*). However, there are difficulties with applying National Park Service (NPS) standards to Woonsocket's situation. NPS standards have been set for communities that are neither as old, nor as densely developed and constrained in space as Woonsocket.

In 1988, Woonsocket established Public Recreation districts in its Zoning Ordinance. These districts are composed of "publicly owned lands and/or facilities set aside for the purpose of active (PR-1) or passive (PR-2) recreational activities." Any proposed development on these lands must be deemed appropriate by the Department of Planning and Development, the Planning Board and City Council, and must also conform to the recreational needs of the City as determined in this Plan. **Of all the City property zoned**

PR-1 or PR-2, only 3 areas are official “conservation areas” designated as protected open space not only through local zoning, but also through private agreements between the City and a second party, in some cases the State. These 3 conservation areas are the Rhodes Avenue Conservation Area, the Booth Pond Conservation Area, and the Iron Rock Brook Conservation Area.

As of January, 1991, Woonsocket had 59 lots totaling 235.29 acres zoned for passive Public Recreation, 17 lots totaling 153.73 acres zoned for active Public Recreation, and a total of 389.02 acres of City-owned Public Recreation land. Add to that State and privately owned land, and City-owned lands not zoned PR, and the total comes to 461.17 acres. Of this acreage a total of 365.71 acres is actually developed and used for recreation purposes. **Changes implemented since 1991 have added approximately 51 acres to the City’s stock of protected open space totaling approximately 506 acres of protected open space.** This compares favorably to the NPS standards for close-to-home (1-2 mile radius, acceptable for Woonsocket's small size) recreational acreage for a population of 45,000 of 281 to 473 acres.

While not all of the parcels zoned PR-1 and PR-2 are currently used for public recreation, their zoning classification represents the City's determination to protect its scarce land resources for future recreational use. Many of these protected yet unused sites are located along the Blackstone River and are intended for long-range development in coordination with the Heritage Corridor (See *Map VI.1*). **The City Council, after recommendation from the Planning Board does retain the ability to build structures on Public Recreation Land, and as with most City owned land, reserves the authority to sell Public Recreation Land when it is in the best interest of the City. This decision is defined not only by this element, but all elements of the Comprehensive Plan. In the event that Public Recreation land is developed, every effort will be made to mitigate the loss of open space with the acquisition of an equal or greater amount of protected open space elsewhere.**

TABLE VI.1
COMPARISON OF NPS STANDARDS TO WOONSOCKET'S PARK INVENTORY

Type	NPS Standards per 45,000 population*	Park Inventory Woonsocket
Mini-park	11.25 to 22.5 acres @ 1 acre/park	2 sites - 0.42 acres total Senior Park: 0.02 acres Main Street Mini-Park: 0.4 acres
Neighborhood Park/ Playground	45 to 90 acres @ 15+ acres/park	4 sites - 68.65 acres total Bernon: 10.2 acres Costa: 9.57 acres Dunn: 11.09 acres Wood Estates: 37.79 acres
Playground	No set standards	6 sites - 0.705 acres total Boyden Street: 0.13 acres Kendrick: 0.295 acres 2 at Morin Heights 2 at Veterans Memorial
Community Park (listed a "Major Park" on the inventory)	225 to 360 acres @ 25+ acres/park	4 sites - 117.94 acres total Cass: 69.5 acres Cold Spring: 19.52 acres Globe: 13.7 acres WWII State Park: 15.22 acres
Playfield	No set standards	6 sites - 63.98 acres total Ayotte Field: 2.03 acres Barry Field: 22.67 acres Bissonette: 12.37 acres Bouley Field: 4.39 acres Harnett: 2.2 acres Menard: 12.32 acres Mt. St. Charles: 8 acres
Regional / Metropolitan Park	225 to 450 acres @ 200+ acres/park	None
Regional Park Reserve	variable @ 1,000+ acres/ park	None
Special Use	No set standards	1 site - 4.2 acres total Dionne Track: 4.2 acres

Public, Undeveloped Open Space	No set standards	<u>3 Sites - 75.75 acres total (69.75 after Patton Road Area reduction)</u> Bound Road: 6.25 acres Darling Pond: 9.25 acres <u>Patton Road Holding Pond: 24 acres (18 after sale of 6 acres and zone change, approved by City Council)</u> <u>Various riverfront parcels: 36.25 acres</u>
Conservation Land	No set standards	<u>7 sites - 168.21 acres total</u> <u>Booth Pond: 94.54 acres</u> <u>Iron Rock Brook: 33.2 acres</u> <u>Rhodes Avenue: 40.47 acres</u>

* roughly Woonsocket's population

Since Woonsocket is in a generally good position with regard to its securing of public open space, concentration must now be placed on the acquisition of targeted sites for specified purposes. Among these specified purposes are neighborhood play lots, riverfront walkways, areas of significant natural resources, and tie-ins to the Heritage Corridor Bikeway and Linear Park system.

State and Private Facilities

Woonsocket is home to a number of recreational facilities that are neither owned nor operated by the City. The State of Rhode Island, Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) provides an important recreation facility at World War II Veterans Memorial State Park. According to the RIDEM, usage of the park, limited by a lack of parking, averages around 100 to 200 persons per day. Concerts held at the park tend to serve the immediate community, mostly elderly, and attract between 200 and 300 people. Fireworks are a big draw, averaging about 1,000 spectators. Autumnfest is this park's main annual event with visitors numbering in the hundreds of thousands over the three days of activities.

World War II Veterans Memorial Park includes a sandy beach, a pool with swimming lanes and a diving board, and a small kiddie pool. Water for swimming is taken from the Mill River and

chlorinated at East School Street on City property. This facility is the only one offering outdoor swimming in Woonsocket. Approximately 80% of its summer visitors swim, and many take advantage of free swimming lessons offered at the park. In the winter, ice-skating is allowed on the main pond, weather permitting. Tennis and volleyball courts are available and are well used, as is a playground that gets constant, year-round use. There is no recreation director at this park, nor is there likely to be in light of State budget cut backs.

Mount Saint Charles Academy, a Catholic parochial secondary educational institution that draws its students from Woonsocket and the surrounding region, also provides recreational facilities. Baseball, softball and soccer fields, as well as open space, are associated with the school. Mount Saint Charles also houses the City's only indoor ice hockey rink.

The CYO, YMCA and YWCA all provide recreational programs for children, while the YMCA and the YWCA also serve adults. The YMCA has one of only two indoor pools in the City (the other being a lap pool at the New England Health and Racquet Club). Programs at these facilities require payment of a fee and are open to members and non-members alike.

Other private recreation providers include fitness centers and clubs, a bowling alley, a roller rink, restaurants (with and without entertainment), cinemas, social clubs, bars, theaters and independent theater groups. Numerous churches and the Woonsocket Senior Center provide recreation programs for citizens and facilities for events, such as Bingo games.

There are currently no other private outdoor recreation facilities in Woonsocket. While facilities requiring large land areas, such as golf courses and skeet shooting, would be hard to accommodate in Woonsocket's constrained area, the City might be able to support some smaller amusement facilities. For example, a miniature golf course or a canoe launch, could be established on public lands to both raise funds and satisfy recreational needs.

Private enterprises have distinct disadvantages. Because they are driven by a profit motive, there are usually direct charges to their clientele, and they are thus exclusionary. In addition, private enterprises often have a high turn-over rate (a youth center with arcade games and dancing recently closed in Woonsocket after less than a year's operation). Nonetheless, their contribution to the life and diversity of the City should not be underestimated, and continued cooperation between public and private recreation providers should be encouraged to avoid unnecessary duplication of services.

Beyond Woonsocket's borders are regional parks, such as Diamond Hill State Park in Cumberland, Lincoln Woods in Lincoln, Snake Den in Johnston and Wallum Pond in Burrillville, that are a short car ride for Woonsocket's residents. And although Woonsocket may be beyond the coastal plain, many of its residents enjoy boating on the Bay. The Rhode Island Public Transportation Authority (RIPTA) runs a beach bus from Woonsocket to the shore during the summer months. In 1990, a rainy year and not good for beach-going, RIPTA carried a total of 1,027 passengers, an average of 21 people a day. The beach bus is thus an important commitment to making salt-water recreation accessible to residents of Woonsocket.

Needs Analysis

Maintenance and Operation

Maintenance and service provision in the Park System have been on a long and continual decline. While the City has been successful in pursuing acquisition and rehabilitation grant monies, manpower and funding for routine park maintenance has been scarce. In response to a question concerning the funding of maintenance and cleanup of the City's parks and playgrounds, approximately half of the residents surveyed called for level spending, while a third were in favor of increased funding.

Over the years, a decline both in the general use of the City's parks and in the communal recreational activities available in those parks occurred. A combination of decreased supervision, events no longer offered, shabby equipment, and inadequate maintenance lead to an increase in vandalism, which further discouraged residents from using the City's parks. Older citizens vividly recall recreation programs and community activities that used to enliven the parks. Many point to decreased commitment to parks and recreation to explain the cut backs in funding, closing of swimming pools, curtailing of summer recreation programs, and lack of police patrols in the parks.

Others have attributed the condition of the parks to the changing life-styles of City residents which have resulted in a change in the role that the Park System plays in the lives of many people. Various social forces, including the trend toward smaller family size, the breakdown of the traditional family, an increased reliance on day-care, and the growing fear of random violence, has resulted in substantial changes in park use. An increasing number of people are not at home during the day, as parents are working and children are at day-care. All of these factors must be taken into account if Woonsocket is to be successful in renewing pride and activity in the parks and in combating vandalism and neglect. Through the implementation of strategies designed to improve the maintenance and operation of the Park System, the City has begun to reverse the downhill slide of maintenance programs and decreasing recreational programs that had been trends of the past twenty years.

Recreational Opportunities

Woonsocket's parks and outdoor recreational programs received a generally favorable rating in the public opinion poll. (See Appendix A.) Of the people surveyed, 72% used the parks with 48% doing so at least once a month. The reported use of the City's parks was found to be closely related to age, with 50% of the

youngest groups going to the park weekly, and 50% of those over 65 not going at all.

These residents heavily support the various league and organized sports associations that make use of the City's parks, including:

- Bernon Little League
- Bob Cousy Basketball League
- Boy's & Girl's Instructional Skating & Hockey
- Boy's Basketball League
- Cracovia Soccer League
- East Woonsocket Little League
- Fair North Little League
- Girl's & Boy's Figure Skating
- Men's Independent Softball League
- Men's Industrial Softball League
- Men's Municipal Baseball
- Men's Over 35 Softball League
- Pre-Teen Football
- Spring & Summer Soccer League
- Sunday Morning Men's Cafe League
- Women's Adult Softball
- Woonsocket American Legion Baseball
- Woonsocket Colt League
- Woonsocket Harriers
- Woonsocket Pony League
- Young Women's Basketball League

While these organizations have an intense and vocal following, and are often the focus of service and facility support, the park system is also used for more independent activities. There has been strong interest in individual, fitness-related activities, a great response to entertainment offerings and a call for opportunities for the quiet enjoyment of natural surroundings. Playgrounds are important for both young children and the adults and teenagers who supervise their play. Many residents also use the parks to walk, socialize, or simply to relax.

Recreational activities that have had high demand for facilities and/or recreational programs include basketball, tennis, soccer and volleyball. In public opinion poll, those who used the parks were asked what recreational activities they took part in at the parks.

Exercising, jogging, walking, using the playgrounds and swings, and participating in team sports were mentioned most frequently. In response to an increasing number of requests from Woonsocket's youth, the City constructed a skateboarding facility with the use of CDBG funds.

Of particular significance to the City's recreational needs is the traditionally high interest of its residents in ice hockey. Thus the ice rinks, for hockey and recreational ice-skating, in the City's parks and at Mt. Saint Charles, are important facilities. The need for lighting to extend winter facility use during months of less daylight has also been recognized.

Woonsocket's Dionne Track at Cass Park, completed in the mid-1980's, has been highly successful. In the past, Woonsocket had placed "fitness courses" in several of its parks, however, they were little used and targets of vandalism. The Dionne Track is so heavily used for walking and running, throughout the day and by all segments of the population, that foot traffic control has become a problem.

Playgrounds are mentioned frequently in surveys and discussion. The continued maintenance and improvement of existing playgrounds is an important City service. The City plans to develop playgrounds in areas not currently serviced, such as Oak Grove, East Woonsocket, and Upper Bernon.

In *Table VI.2*, NPS standards for recreation have been contrasted with the facilities available in Woonsocket and the results of the "needs assessment" survey sponsored by the Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Citizens Advisory Commission. This comparison shows interest in activities where facilities are provided: baseball, basketball, tennis, volleyball, playgrounds and tracks. It also shows strong interest in activities that are not provided, or are poorly provided, such as swimming, biking, concerts/events, amusement enterprises (i.e.: miniature golf) and passive activities (i.e.: picnicking and "hanging out"). The category for "Other Forms of Recreation" has been included to indicate the

importance of creating facilities that allow for non-traditional types of recreational activities and needs beyond the standard guidelines.

The City must strive to improve recreational opportunities for all demographic segments of the population, and especially for the two age groups that are perceived to be most at need -- the elderly and youth of Woonsocket -- and for the increasing numbers of Southeast Asian and Hispanic minority group populations who have arrived since the last census. The City is committed to meeting the culturally distinctive recreational needs of these newly arrived immigrant populations. However, the task of determining the nature of those needs might prove quite difficult.

Although there is a need for more recreational activities for seniors, the City's older residents appear to be most interested in cultural events, and transportation to the parks is one of the most important issues that needs to be addressed. (See the Circulation Element for further discussion of transportation needs.)

TABLE VI.2
COMPARISON OF RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES TO NPS STANDARDS AND
ACTIVITIES MENTIONED IN PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY: ACTIVE RECREATION

Activity	NPS Standards per 45,000 population	Park Inventory	Survey: % mention
Archery	0.9	--	7.4
Badminton	9	--	14.2
Baseball			33.3
1. Official	9 (1.5 lighted)	4	
2. Little League		9	
3. Softball* & Hardball	9	3	1.9
Basketball	9	7	32.7
Biking	--	--	20.4
Bocce	--	--	4.3
Football	2.25	1	17.6
Golf- driving range	0.9 (25 tees min.)		
1. Par 3	--		
2. 9 hole Std.	1.8		
3. 18 hole Std.	0.9		
4. Miniature	--		25.9
Handball	2.25	--	10.8
Hiking trails	--	--	10.8
Hockey	2.25		9.6
1. Field		1	
2. Street		1	
Hockey, ice			9.6
1. Indoor	0.45	1	
2. Outdoor	depends on climate	3	
Ice Skating	--	3	13.6
Horseback riding*	--	--	0.9
Horseshoes	--	5	7.4
Kickball*	--	--	2.2
Lacrosse	--	--	4
Playground	--	13	34.3
Polo	--	--	4.9
Roller skating	--	--	19.4
Rugby	--	--	3.1
Skateboarding*	--	--	3.1
Skeet & Trap Field	0.9	--	--
Sledding	--	--	10.8
Soccer			18.5
1. Official	--	1	
2. Unofficial	--	4	
Swimming	2.25	1	31.5
Tennis	22.5	13	24.1
Track and Field			
1. 1/4 Running Track	2.25	2	13.6
2. Jogging Track	--	--	13
Volleyball	9	2	27.4
Walking	--	1	22.2

* These uses did not appear on the questionnaire's list.

**TABLE VI.3
COMPARISON OF RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES TO NPS STANDARDS AND
ACTIVITIES MENTIONED IN PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY: PASSIVE RECREATION**

Activity	NPS Standards per 45,000 population	Park Inventory	Survey: % mention
Arts & Crafts	--	--	17.3
Historic Sites	--	--	5.2
Outdoor Concerts	--	--	31.2
Sculpture Garden	--	--	5.2
Theater-under-the-stars	--	--	13.3
Backpacking	--	--	5.2
Birding	--	--	5.2
Conservation	--	--	8.6
Ecology	--	--	6.5
Nature Walks	--	--	14.5
Wetlands	--	--	7.4
Wildlife	--	--	15.4
Water	--	--	17
Boating	--	--	11.1
Canoeing	--	--	7.7
Fishing	--	--	17
Toy Sailboats	--	--	6.2
Amusements	--	--	19.1
Festivals	--	--	24.4
Carnivals*	--	--	1.9
Carousals	--	--	7.4
Games*	--	--	3.7
Rides*	--	--	2.8
Video Arcade*	--	--	0.6
Board Games*	--	--	0.3
Food*	--	--	0.3
Exercise	--	--	15.4
Field Days	--	--	29
Sports Events	--	--	27.5
Hanging Out	--	--	26.5
People Watching	--	--	7.4
Picnics	--	50 tables at 18 sites	21.6
Peace & Quiet	--	--	20.7
Snoozing	--	--	7.1
Strolling	--	--	6.2
Tanning	--	--	10.8
Dog Walking*	--	--	1.2
Flower Gardens	--	--	11.5
Forests	--	--	7.1
Fountains	--	--	9.9
Grass	--	--	11.7
Trees	--	--	10.8

* These uses did not appear on the questionnaire's list.

For younger residents, the problem is a lack of supervised recreation opportunities. Assertions have repeatedly been made that there are not enough year-round recreational opportunities for the youth of the City. It has been noted that this is particularly so for pre-teen and junior high school students who may be too old for, or uninterested in, league sports. In addition, this lack of entertainment opportunities has been linked with the perceived inability of the City to convince its young adults to remain in Woonsocket. Respondents to the public opinion poll strongly supported the establishment of a Youth Center for recreation and human services, similar to the Woonsocket Senior Center. A full 87% of the respondents were in favor of this proposal.

Specific information about the physically handicapped population in the City is not readily available (although the high elderly population in the City would suggest that it might be of particular concern). Efforts have been made in recent park redevelopment to include handicap access to parks, but as previously mentioned, some park areas are marked by very difficult terrain, which cannot be made accessible by conventional means.

Facility Rehabilitation

Noted deficiencies in City-wide recreational facilities are in the areas of basketball and tennis courts. The very active children's soccer league is in need of playing fields, which might be accommodated by multi-use fields, as well as sheds to store their equipment. The success of the Dionne track for walking indicates a need that had not been previously recognized. In the redevelopment of older parks, the City is attempting to meet this need by including measured loop paths in the designs. The City must also address the establishment of designated trails and interpretive features in conservation areas, to make these areas more accessible while discouraging the endangerment of sensitive natural resources.

The following is a park-by-park summary of redevelopment plans, and projected redevelopment needs of existing City parks:

Bernon Park:

Bernon Park is a heavily used major facility for its surrounding neighborhood. The City has installed lighting for night use of this park. Some of Bernon's facilities require major repairs or replacement, and play apparatus is needed.

Booth Pond Conservation Area:

This conservation area is in need of interpretive features to support public use and educational programs, including trail marking and signage. Though the City's approval of the "Trinity Village" residential development off Wanda Avenue, the Booth Pond Conservation Area expanded by approximately 26 acres in 2005. This acreage was granted to the City in exchange for approximately 4 acres of the conservation area given to the developer for the purpose of constructing single family homes. This "land swap" was implemented after review and approval of both RIDEM and the US Department of Interior, the agencies which initially enabled the City's ownership of this property.

Bouley Field:

Woonsocket's central sports facility, this field could use lighting, restroom and court improvements, as well as improvements to landscaping and parking layout. Overhead wires must be buried to qualify for federal or State funding. This represents a considerable expense for the City.

Boyden Street Play lot:

This playground is an important recreational outlet, but requires major overhaul including regrading, attention to the site layout, and replacement of worn play structures. Construction documents have been drawn for these renovations.

Cass Park:

A major facility, Dionne Track, has recently been developed in Cass Park. More work is needed to integrate this facility with the rest of

the park. In addition, reconditioning of this facility is needed, **as much of the park has fallen into disrepair. Planned improvements include a new portable ice rink, replacement of the existing playground facilities, upgrades to the baseball field, tot lot, lighting and signage, erosion control, and replacement of the storm water line flowing from Cass Pond.**

Citizens Memorial Park:

Citizen's Memorial Park includes both playing fields and ~~conservation areas~~ **open space**. The provision of public access and interpretation at the conservation areas is difficult at best, as these areas are largely composed of wetlands. The playing fields at Citizens Memorial need rehabilitation work, most notably the Little League field.

Cold Spring Park:

One of the City's flagship parks, Cold Spring Park has undergone major renovations: Improvements were made to the playing fields, and in the areas of vehicular access and parking. In addition, a community-built playground was installed. Further phases of development will be needed to improve access, appearance, and erosion control of the upper slopes toward Harris Avenue, to connect the park to the Bikeway, to allow greater interaction with the riverfront, and to improve access from the River Street side.

Costa Park:

Costa Park could provide much needed service for the Fairmount and Constitution Hill neighborhoods, and be an important contributor to the Heritage Corridor Linear Park, but meager development, neglect and vandalism have resulted in a derelict facility. Master Planning for a rehabilitation effort has been completed and construction documents are now being drawn.

Dunn Park:

This park is a major neighborhood facility and as such experiences heavy use. Dunn Park has some difficulties with its layout, could use expanded facilities, and is in need of major renovations. The

City is in the process of developing a Master Plan for the rehabilitation of Dunn Park.

East Woonsocket Park:

Like Citizens Memorial, this park includes both playing field and ~~conservation area~~ **open space**. The ~~conservation area~~ **open space** will be subject to limited development but nonetheless has the need for access and interpretation. Parking is a major problem for the Bissonette Playing Field at East Woonsocket, due to the emerging use of the field for organized sports. This field was originally established to serve the immediate neighborhood. Scheduled league play was never its intended purpose, and conflicts with neighborhood needs have evolved from league use.

Globe Park:

Globe is another of the City's flagship parks and was completely rehabilitated in 1992.

Kendrick Avenue Play lot:

Like the Boyden Street playground, Kendrick Avenue requires major overhaul including regrading, improvements to site layout, and replacement of worn play structures. Construction documents have been drawn for these renovations.

Main Street Mini-Park:

The land for this park was recently secured by the City. Reconstruction of the park is planned in conjunction with Main Street improvements but will be complicated by subsurface and retaining wall structural problems.

Patton Road Open Space

In 2004, the City reached an agreement with WalMart Stores Inc. whereby WalMart will purchase approximately 6 acres of this over-24 acre property now zoned PR-2. WalMart intends on purchasing these 6 acres for the expansion of its Diamond Hill Road store and related parking area. WalMart, as part of the agreement, will make substantial improvements to the detention pond north of Patton Road which has experienced localized

flooding over the years. The majority of the Patton Road Open Space will still serve as a buffer between the Patton Road neighborhood and Diamond Hill Road commercial uses. Although this sale represents a loss of approximately 6 acres of publicly owned open space, the City also experienced a gain of approximately 26 acres of open space through the expansion of the Booth Pond Conservation Area near the North Smithfield townline.

Rhodes Avenue Conservation Areas:

This recently expanded Conservation Area would benefit from trail marking, signage and educational programs.

Park Development

The City is presently planning the development of several new parks. River Island Park, the highest priority for development over the last few years, is complete. This park is of crucial importance to the City as an area of great physical and historic interest, as an amenity to the densely populated downtown neighborhoods, and especially, in its connection with the completed Heritage Corridor Visitor's Center and planned Blackstone River Bikeway. The park provides an exceptional location for recently hosted public events including press conferences and concerts, and furnishes a beautiful restful place for everyday visitors.

An area still to be developed is The Island. riverfront property, directly opposite Costa Park, was acquired in 1990 and is intended to provide passive recreation and access to the Blackstone River. In addition, land has been acquired off River Street along the Blackstone to tie into the Linear Park system and the Bikeway. This land, which will form an important part of the linear string of parks, is immediately adjacent to Market Square and the planned Visitor's Center, and overlooks Woonsocket (Thundermist) Falls.

Many people at public discussions judged the health of the City by its entertainment opportunities, and, despite the opportunities

mentioned above, found it lacking. In the public opinion poll, 6% of the people stated that what they disliked about Woonsocket was that there was nothing to do. Suggestions for improving this situation ranged from the development of Market Square into a plaza where people could gather, hang out and promenade, to the rehabilitation of the Stadium Theater for use as a concert hall, to the establishment of amusement concessions on City land.

At the same time, however, when questioned about increasing funding for the development of new park facilities, half of the respondents favored level spending, one quarter favored lower spending, and only one quarter favored higher spending. While a need clearly exists for the expansion and diversity of the recreational opportunities currently available to Woonsocket residents, the funding for such expansion is not readily available.

A major addition to the City's recreational amenities is the State's planned Blackstone Valley Bikeway. As shown in Map VI1, the Woonsocket portion of the proposed bikeway runs from the North Smithfield townline next to Manville Road and follows the path of the Blackstone River to Downtown Woonsocket and onward to the stateline. The bikeway will link with other recreational facilities including River Island Park and the proposed Municipal Soccer and Golf Complex on the site of the former municipal landfill off Davison Avenue. City officials along with the Woonsocket Main Street/Riverfront Initiative should work with RIDOT to plan for a precise route which will maximize public access to the Blackstone River and promote economic development in the City. The Blackstone Valley Bikeway will ultimately extend 48 miles from Providence to Worcester, MA, and will be part of a larger network of biketrails linking Woonsocket to the greater New England region.

~~In addition, the proposed future development of a riverside multi-purpose recreational facility, on the site of the former transfer station, has been recommended for further study. Possible features of the proposed park might include facilities for water-related recreation, nature trails, playing fields, and a campsite. However,~~

~~before any development can take place, a full environmental analysis of the site must be conducted, and any necessary cleanup undertaken.~~

The City has also begun planning for a Municipal Soccer and Golf Complex on the site of the former municipal landfill off of Davison Avenue. Although not in active use as a landfill for several decades, the landfill has been ordered capped by RIDEM. The City has analyzed capping strategies and is in the process of covering the contaminated soil which potentially endangers the Blackstone River. The City has been awarded grant money from RIDEM to assist in the conversion of the property into a recreational complex benefiting local residents by offering opportunities for both active and passive recreation. The site will provide a link with the Blackstone Valley Bikeway (offering plentiful parking for bicyclists), and include a site for a riverfront canoe launch.

Open Space Protection

The development of Woonsocket is tightly linked to the Blackstone River, which dominates the physical form of the City. Still it is difficult to get close to, or even to see the river in Woonsocket. The City will continue to acquire and protect river frontage and Bikeway-related areas for a future linear park system. Other areas of natural significance that are slated for protection are Iron Rock Brook, Cherry Brook, and an expanded area around Booth Pond.

While Woonsocket has benefited from a long history of park development and the securing of open space land of great physical presence and natural beauty, further improvements to heighten aesthetic experiences in the City can be made. Recapturing riverfront lands for public enjoyment should be a high priority of future open space programs in Woonsocket. While some public parks, notably Cold Spring and Costa, are located along the river, physical and even visual access to the river is still restricted, in part because of the extensive rip-rapping and low water height set by the flood control project. The rugged land form upon which most

of Woonsocket is built provides an opportunity for scenic views of the Blackstone River Valley and of the City itself. Every opportunity to preserve and open these views must be seized.

In addition, since most of the City's parks and conservation areas are not along major public thoroughfares, and must be sought out to be appreciated, there is a desire for the extension of a park-like setting onto these thoroughfares and throughout Woonsocket's downtown area. Many residents have shown interest in street-tree planting programs and other beautification projects.

Goals and Policies

The following goals and policies have been developed to guide Woonsocket in the provision and management of open space and recreational opportunities:

1. To maximize integration of the City Park System with the Heritage Corridor through:
 - Development of park facilities that enhance the historical importance of the Blackstone River to the City's growth and development; and
 - Development and interpretation of historical elements and features of the City through its park facilities.
2. To improve the level and quality of maintenance and attention to the City's parks through:
 - Increased citizen participation and support for the City's parks and recreation system;
 - Improvements in the City's ability and commitment to fund park maintenance and development; and
 - Development of necessary park and conservation area support facilities to enhance patronage, personal safety and ease of use;

3. To make a consistent and progressive commitment to the provision of efficient, well-managed recreational services and facilities through:
 - Administrative restructuring;
 - Aggressive pursuit of sufficient funding;
 - Coordination of municipal recreation services with other providers;
 - Private collaboration; and
 - Direct citizen participation
4. To preserve and protect significant undeveloped and environmentally sensitive areas through acquisition, management and public educational programs.
5. To diversify the activity focus of the City's Park System through the provision of opportunities for passive recreation.
6. To provide a variety of recreational areas and facilities for all demographic groups and residential areas in the community.
7. To promote equity in park, recreation and open space expenditure by targeting the City's densely developed, low income neighborhoods.

Implementation

The following strategies are recommended for the implementation of the goals and policies stated above: Please see the Implementation Schedule at the conclusion of this document for priorities, time frames, and responsible parties for the strategies below.

Heritage Corridor Development

1. Develop a combined master plan for recreation, interpretation and tourism development along the Blackstone River, coordinated with the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission, the Woonsocket Heritage Corridor Planning and Advisory Commission, RIDEM and the Rhode Island Department of Transportation.
2. Protect river-frontage with appropriate land use controls, including the establishment of a Heritage Corridor River Overlay District.
3. Implement a program to increase public awareness of the natural resources and recreational opportunities associated with the Heritage Corridor.
4. Develop a small portion of the Heritage Corridor to act as the first public benefit of the City's plans along the river and to encourage tourism.
5. Support the development of a multi-faceted Visitor Center/Labor History Museum in the Falls Yarn Mill Building to attract regional tourism in conjunction with the Woonsocket Industrial Development Corporation, the Heritage Corridor Commission and RIDEM.

6. Continue with plans to develop River Island Park, the riverfront park adjacent to the Visitor's Center.
7. Participate in the development of a revenue generation master plan for the Heritage Corridor.
8. Investigate the creation of a municipal improvement corporation to acquire parkland along the Blackstone River in Woonsocket.
9. Continue with rehabilitation efforts in the City's riverfront parks -- Cold Spring and Costa.
10. Implement plans for the development of The Island and parks along River Street.
11. Continue support, both technical and monetary, for Corridor-related developments.
12. ~~Lobby for immediate listing of the former transfer station as a Superfund site, and investigate the possibility of establishing a riverside multi-purpose recreational facility on that site.~~ **Plan for the conversion of the former municipal landfill off Davison Avenue into a Municipal Soccer and Golf Complex, to be developed with the assistance of State, Federal and private funding, after capping of the former landfill is complete.**
13. Lobby for the reinstatement of the Roger Williams Fund for support of Northern Rhode Island tourism development.
14. Develop park concession guidelines for the future management of visitor services along the Heritage Corridor.
15. Establish an annual festival and events calendar and public awareness campaign for Woonsocket in conjunction with the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council.

16. Monitor progress in the development of the Heritage Corridor Bikeway, **and work closely with State agencies to plan a specific route which maximizes public access to the riverfront and economic development opportunities in the City.**
17. Consider allocation of hotel/motel tax revenues to assist in the development and operation of Heritage Corridor plans.

Rehabilitation and Maintenance

1. Create a position in the Parks Department for an expert in horticulture to maintain and improve the plant resources in the City's parks and natural areas, and to establish a City-wide tree planting program.
2. Investigate the establishment of an annual plan for police protection in parks with specific inclusions for levels of effort, schedules and reporting mechanisms.
3. Continue redevelopment of existing neighborhood parks with an emphasis on family and passive recreation features.
4. Institute a City-wide planting program for the replacement of dead and dying plant material and the planting of trees in the parks, to improve the aesthetic quality of the parks, and to provide comfort and shade to park users.
5. Establish public educational programs in the areas of conservation and park history, as a means of increasing understanding and appreciation of these valuable resources.
6. Create model "Adopt A Park" projects (park advocacy group) to capitalize on the community's desire to participate in park cleanup and improvements, for City parks and conservation areas.

7. Replace or recondition deteriorated play equipment and sports facilities in the City's parks.
8. Continue with planned improvements and rehabilitation work at Cass, Cold Spring, Costa, Dunn and Globe Parks.
9. Assess the need for improvements to Bissonette Field.
10. Implement management plans in the City's conservation areas **and public open space.**
11. Make use of spoils from the Public Works Department, Highway Division as material for paths and regrading of parks wherever possible.

Administration

1. ~~Compose a transition plan to establish a Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department and re-establish and expand the duties of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board.~~
2. ~~Remove the Parks and Recreation Division from the Department of Public Works and form an independent department combining the management function of the present Parks Division with the planning and fund generation functions that have been carried out by the Department of Planning and Development.~~
3. Reestablish the Recreation Advisory Commission for community involvement and coordination, and strengthen its role in recreation planning and provision.
4. Establish a parks classification system including categories for play lots, neighborhood parks, City-wide parks, conservation areas and special parks as a priority function of the newly formed Parks and Recreation Advisory Board.

5. Analyze all existing City property for potential neighborhood park classification, and land bank suitable parcels for future development whenever possible.
6. Determine and implement a supervisory management system for the City's parks, including the small neighborhood playgrounds.
7. Coordinate efforts with local schools for the use of **public open space** and conservation areas for their outdoor education curricula.
8. Create revised policies and guidelines for the role of the Conservation Commission in relationship to the parks and recreation system.
9. Make a long term commitment to gradually increase the general fund appropriation for park and recreation operations, to a level comparable with per capita appropriations for parks and recreation in other Rhode Island communities. (See addendum in the Parks Recreation and Tourism Action Plan, Appendix F, for 1987 per capita appropriations.)
10. Establish a parks and recreation services revenue policy with established categories for various levels of tax subsidization and user fees.
11. Separate non-park, non-recreation functions from the park and recreation operating budget.
12. Establish a cost of services accounting procedure to provide decision makers and citizens with accurate information on the use of parks and recreation funds.
13. Investigate funding options for park acquisition and development:

Option #1 - Continue existing general fund and park grant procedures with no increase in tax levels.

Option #2 - Consider general obligation bonds for park acquisition and development with a slight increase in real estate tax rates.

Option #3 - Consider special fee levies such as check-offs, special fees and other voluntary revenue options.

14. Continue aggressive pursuit of State and federal park development grants to supplement existing municipal funding sources.
15. Explore other opportunities to fund park development.
16. Investigate the creation of a municipal improvement corporation.
17. Investigate the creation of a parks and recreation foundation to attract and manage private participation in parks, recreation and tourism development.
18. Establish a system to quantify volunteer efforts expended for park and recreational services, and begin an awards program to recognize the contributions of individuals and groups.
19. Explore opportunities for the use of volunteers or in-kind labor forces for park development (i.e.: Civilian Conservation Corps).
20. Encourage the continued supply of technical support for open space and conservation efforts (i.e.: the Environmental Review Team), and lobby for streamlining of RIDEM wetland review and approval for park development.

Conservation of Open Space

1. Establish appropriate zoning regulations to guide the development of Woonsocket's remaining undeveloped areas, to

limit the intensity of their development and protect their natural resources.

2. Continue acquiring properties where feasible and implement new open space preservation techniques to protect land for future public access.
3. Utilize local and State-wide resources to inventory the natural resources contained in the **public open space** and conservation areas and to survey the remaining large tracts of undeveloped land for significant natural resources.
4. Develop feature parks that promote environmental protection and enhance scenic and recreational opportunities and access along City waterways.
5. Continue **public open space and** conservation area acquisition by land use planning and either direct or easement purchase measures.
6. Explore the demand for the acquisition of parkland adjacent to a conservation area for the development of a "district level" park.

Meeting Recreational Needs

1. Conduct annual parks and recreation demand surveys of the general public.
2. Plan and implement improvements to the access, trails, parking, and interpretive exhibit features of **public open space and** conservation areas to allow for increased public use.
3. Acquire and develop a new neighborhood park in Oak Grove or East Woonsocket in response to population growth.
4. Create a park planning workbook and guidelines for park improvements including community participation procedures.

5. Establish a task force to explore the creation of a Youth Center.
6. Conduct annual planning workshops with parks and recreation interest groups in an effort to determine and meet the needs of all segments of Woonsocket's population.
7. Produce a park and recreation guide/ map for public use.
8. Create a conservation area/ nature preserve guide booklet on Woonsocket's natural areas.
9. Create outdoor classrooms and study trails to compliment the School Department's outdoor education programs in parks adjacent to school sites.
10. Encourage the State to continue, and to expand where possible, recreation services at World War II Veterans Memorial State Park (especially in regard to swimming and cultural events) and other State recreational facilities.
11. Work with the Rhode Island Department of Transportation to ensure the continued provision of "beach buses" and to expand transportation services as needed.
12. Continue with park rehabilitation and development as financial opportunities arise.